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UNIVERSITY OF ALBERTA

# PARENTS OF STUDENTS IN FRENCH IMMERSION AND ENGLISH PROGRAMS: A COMPARATIVE STUDY

by

VICKI BRASSARD

A THESIS

SUBMITTED TO THE FACULTY OF GRADUATE STUDIES
AND RESEARCH IN PARTIAL FULFILMENT OF THE
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MASTER OF EDUCATION
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DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATIONAL PSYCHOLOGY

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Dr. H. Janzen

Dr. J. Paterson

Dr. T. Carson

Date: August 27, 1990

## DEDICATION

To my husband Jules, children
Nicole, Matthew, Andrea, and Graeme,
Mom and Dad and Aunt Vicky

for their patience, understanding and
above all, their encouragement and support.

## ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study was to elicit and examine in a comparative context, the personal and social factors which influence the differential placement of children in the English or the French immersion elementary school program. The study took place in a rural dual-track school in Northwestern Alberta. A questionnaire, which was given to parents via the eldest child in each family (N=245), provided the data to be analyzed.

Significant differences were found between parents with children in the English program and parents with children in the French immersion program with respect to socio-economic status, values, attitudes, beliefs, and practical concerns and practices regarding their children and elementary education. Specifically, parent groups differed with respect to the following factors: educational background, occupation, confidence in their children's ability, volunteer time, frequency of reading to their children, influence of others, stability of opinion, and desire to learn a second language. Their attitudes toward several socio-political issues and views on bilingualism, the effectiveness of core French/immersion programs, dual-track schools, and the cost of programming, also differed.

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# CHAPTER 1

# INTRODUCTION

## Need for the study

French immersion education programs are available in every major Canadian city and in many towns across Canada. Consequently, many parents are faced with a choice of educational program for their children. Parents who live in an area where a dual-track school is located are particularly affected. At registration, the first question they answer is: 'In which program do you wish to enroll your child?' Over the past two decades, more and more parents have selected French immersion.

The popularity of the program has created difficulties across the country. In 1983 a survey by the Canadian Education Association in the North Vancouver School District #44, Coquitlam School District #43, and the Regina Roman Catholic School Board, revealed that enrollment in their regular stream was reduced - in some cases drastically - because of the introduction of the French immersion program. Faced with decreasing enrollments in regular English programs and rapidly increasing enrollments in French immersion programs, school jurisdictions have found it difficult to staff immersion positions. Declining enrollment in English programs has required changes in many aspects of school programs, which in turn have affected the community. Anxiety related to job security and genuine concern about the effects of immersion on English programs have caused consternation for parents, staff, administration,

school board members, and members of the community at large.

Despite these difficulties and in the midst of the debate on the Constitutional Accord, the Environics survey for Canadian Parents for French showed that over one-third of Canadians polled would enroll a child in an immersion program if it were available. French immersion may be here to stay and as Robert Cotterill, a principal of a dual-track school, stated "...its rapid development has generated some difficult and thorny problems as well as creating, at times, a particularly thorny bed for school administrators" (Cotterill, 1983, p. 68).

Ecole Mountain View School is the only school in Hinton, Alberta with a French immersion program. It has experienced a declining enrollment since 1979 for several reasons, including the effect of French immersion. From 1976 to 1979 Ecole Mountain View School's enrollment was approximately 750 students from kindergarten to grade seven. Surrounding rural students and all grade seven students from Hinton were in Ecole Mountain View School's attendance area. Due to overcrowding, the Yellowhead School Division built a junior high school to accommodate all grade sevens' and eights' in Hinton. In 1981, the division rerouted bus students from Ecole Mountain View School to another elementary school in Hinton. A further decrease occurred in 1983 when the Roman Catholic School Board was formed. The Separate School Board bought the junior high school, which was within walking distance of Ecole Mountain View School, and designated it an elementary school. The grade seven students from the junior high school returned to

Ecole Mountain View School and the division opened a new public school to accommodate the grade one to five population from the nearby neighborhood. Because of a move toward the implementation of neighborhood schools in the Yellowhead School Division, in 1987 the new school retained its students until grade seven. Also in 1988, because of the division's policy on integration, special needs children returned to their neighborhood school. This resulted in another decrease in population. In addition, the families in the surrounding attendance area have aged. Finally, the French immersion program, which began at Ecole Mountain View School in 1981 with 24 students at the Kindergarten level, appears to have accelerated the already declining school population in the regular English stream.

Ecole Mountain View School School was particularly appropriate for a comparative study of parents because it exemplified the trends of many dual-track schools. Immersion enrollment had a major effect on the regular English program - student numbers had decreased, combined classes were common, and the scholastically more able students appeared to be in the French immersion stream. English teachers were transferred while French immersion teachers often had their choice of province, city, town, school,and grade. Administration had to deal with the resentment and insecurity that resulted from this situation. The growth of the French immersion program at Ecole Mountain View School School provided an excellent example of the adage "...that success is sometimes a bane as well as a blessing" (Olson and Burns, 1983, p.12).

Researchers have referred to Immersion as: the St. Lambert experiment" (Carey 1984:246); "the most successful program ever recorded in the professional language teaching literature" (Krashen 1984:61); "The Trial Balloon That Flew" (Lapkin, Swain, Argue 1983:1); "A Thorny Bed of Roses" (Cotterill 1983:68), "Bilingualism Without Tears" (Swain 1982:1); "just another fad" (Collinson 1989:23); "a quiet revolution" (Stern 1984:506); and the "fattest of sacred cows in Canadian second language education" (Hammerly, as cited in Daneault 1983:11). In a statement specific to immersion, Stephen Carey (1984) said:

> The most powerful cluster of variables that will influence a student's performance in an immersion program is a combination of the attitudes, values, and the degree of ethnocentricity that the student acquires in his sociocultural and familial background (p.258).

To date, research in immersion has focused on the achievement level of French immersion students compared with their counterparts in the regular English or French programs. Little information exists regarding the parents who made the choice between the French immersion or English program. Why have parents chosen one program rather than the other? What are the concomitant effects of their decision? According to Lapkin and Swain (1989):

> The possible effects of immersion on 'those left behind' are also a major concern. Edwards explains that one of the greatest sources of opposition... comes from educators and parents who feel that the system as a whole has been negatively affected by immersion. I don't think it's a problem that we can ignore. How true is it, for instance, that since many of the better students are in immersion, the regular classes are left with few leaders, few good models and so the whole level of achievement is decreased? (p. 32)

## Research purpose

The purpose of this study was to elicit and examine the social and personal (attitudes and values) factors that influence the placement of children in the French immersion and the English programs. Most parents base their decisions on a set of values, beliefs, and practical concerns regarding oneself, one's child, and the nature of the French immersion program. The investigator relied upon personal experience, feedback from parents and relevant literature to determine the discriminating factors. Then these factors were used as a basis for a comparison of parents who had children in the French immersion program with parents who had children in the regular English program. The findings highlighted the following eight factors which are associated with the differential placement of children in elementary school programs.

1. Observations and reports have suggested that most children in French immersion come from the middle-class strata of society (Stern 1978; Burns 1982). However, very few studies have examined the relationship between socio-economic status and participation in French immersion programs within the context of a comparison analysis in Western Canada.

2. Personal beliefs and the influence of others in the community on placement decisions have received little attention in research. Also relatively unexplored is the degree of parental satisfaction with the placement decision and subsequent instruction.

3. Several variables that enhance learning such as: parental

assessment of their children's ability, educational goals, parental involvement, reading to children, and availability of books were examined. Convincing evidence suggests that when parents show interest in their children's schooling, provide encouragement and become actively involved, they promote positive attitudes, affect aspirations, and increase achievement. It is difficult for schools to modify student ability and family socio-economic status but parental involvement can be increased. Again, there was a dearth of information on this topic in a comparative context.

4. An investigation of ethnic origin and second or third language competency of parents with respect to program was included in the study. Of special interest was the extent to which children of linguistic and ethnic groups other than the Anglo-Canadian and French Canadian populations participate in the French immersion program.

5. An examination of attitudes toward several socio-political issues such as the Official Languages Act and the separation of Quebec and their relative importance in distinguishing parents of French immersion students from their counterparts in the regular English program was a focus of the investigation.

6. The investigator explored parental views with respect to immersion and core French programs: Core French achievement, English achievement of French immersion students, the development of functional bilingualism, the suitability of immersion for all children, and the cost of programming. Except for the suitability of immersion for all children, these educational concerns have been

very widely studied with agreement in most areas.

7. Variables directly associated with the placement of students in French immersion programs such as: values associated with acquiring fluency in French (as outlined by Gardner and Lambert, 1972), parents' desire to speak a second language and the view of immersion as creating an 'elite' were examined in this comparative study. Again, little research was available on these topics in a Western Canadian context.

8. The move toward neighborhood schools in many school divisions seems to work against the placement of children in a French immersion program that is located outside the immediate neighborhood. Except for a study in Winnipeg (Bienvenue, 1983), regarding the significance of neighborhood schools in the differential placement of children in elementary schools, this topic has not been addressed.

In view of the important influences parental attitudes exert on student academic achievement and language acquisition (Plowden (1967) as cited in Bynner 1972; Gardner and Lambert 1972; Carey, 1984; Ziegler, 1987), the results of this study were to provide the investigator with a greater understanding of parents' beliefs, attitudes and values. They would establish a base from which to work with parents as partners in the education of their children.

**Background information**

According to Genesee (1983), the immersion experiment began at

St. Lambert in the early 1960s. Several parents, educational authorities, and researchers including Wilder Penfield, of the Montreal Neurological Institute at McGill, began to seek improved methods of French second language (FSL) instruction for English-speaking children. Based on the results from research in social psychology, psycholinguistics and sociolinguistics, these researchers created a language learning environment that agreed with existing knowledge about natural language acquisition and human learning. Their goals were to break down the linguistic barriers between their anglophone community and French-speaking Quebecers and to provide their children with the French skills necessary to compete equally for employment in Quebec. In 1965, parents in St. Lambert placed their children in an early total immersion setting where they learned school subjects entirely in French. Regarding this method of second-language teaching, Sharon Lapkin, a researcher with the Modern Language Centre of the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education, said:

> We learn a language (including our own) by hearing things in that language about subjects we want or need to know about. The subject matter is what motivates us to learn the language, which is the vehicle that carries that subject matter to our brain. (as cited by the Official Languages Department of the Secretary of State of Canada, 1990)

Since 1965, the demand by parents for French immersion has spread across Canada and into the United States. Enrollment, according to the Secretary of State has increased from 3,733 in 1975-1976 to more than a quarter of a million in 1990 (Official Languages, 1990). It has had an impact on politicians, school

boards, universities, educators, publishers, students and parents. School boards responded to parental pressure for immersion education by offering a variety of 'immersion' programs: early immersion (beginning in kindergarten or grade one), middle immersion (usually beginning at grade four), and late immersion (usually beginning in grade seven or eight). Variations exist in the amount of instruction provided in the second language each year and/or in the number of years during which the second language is the principal medium of instruction.

Federal funding via provincial grants, disenchantment of parents and educators with core French programs, the stated national policy of multiculturalism within a bilingual framework, and the proven educational effectiveness of immersion (Swain and Barik 1976; Swain 1979; Genesee 1983, Cummins 1978-79, Gray 1981; Genesee, et al. 1985) have served to increase the popularity of the program. According to Lapkin and Swain (1984), French immersion has been one of the most thoroughly researched educational innovations in Canada since its inception in St. Lambert.

**Research Context**

Ecole Mountain View School School is in Hinton, an industrial community, which is located in northwestern Alberta. At the time of the study, Hinton had a population of approximately 9,000. According to Statistics Canada (1988), the ethnic origin of the population was as follows: British, 26%, French, 7%, Multiple

Origins, 48%, Other, 19%. With respect to level of education, 56% of the population had high school or less, 31% had some post-secondary schooling, and 13% had university training. A high percentage of wage earners in Hinton were employed in the industries (mining and forestry) which form the town's economic base. The average family income in 1986 was $43,935 - the highest in the Yellowhead Region.

Geographically, the town is divided into a hill and a valley section. In June, 1990 there were three kindergarten to grade 7 public schools, one kindergarten to grade 7 separate school (Roman Catholic), and one public high school in Hinton. The high school and one of the public elementary schools were located in the valley. Ecole Mountain View School School, which housed the French immersion program, was located on the hill. Of a total of 425 students in the school, 261 were in the French immersion program. These children came from the entire town of Hinton and its surrounding area. Most of the 164 students in the English program, were from Ecole Mountain View School's attendance area.

In order to increase enrollment in the English stream at Ecole Mountain View School and reduce enrollment at a nearby school, Board members and school officials have contemplated either the creation of an immersion center or the redistribution of students by altering attendance areas. Also, the administration has worked with Parent Advisory Committees to reduce the strained relations between anglophone parent groups in Hinton. The consensus seemed to be that some parents would be pleased and others upset

regardless of the decisions made. As Max Yalden (1978-79), the Commissioner of Languages, stated:

> Language is not only the predominant form of human self-expression: it is the key to our communal heritage. Is it any wonder, then, that individuals feel so strongly about it, and that we all instinctively react both as individuals and as members of the community to any issue involving language (p.4).

# CHAPTER 2

# REVIEW OF LITERATURE

## Socio-economic status

That immersion programs were established as a result of lobbying from parents suggested that this group was very knowledgeable about the politics of education and well enough organized to be able to use this knowledge to their advantage. A national survey commissioned by Canadian Parents for French (Environics, 1990), reported that support for second language education was highest among the university-educated (81%). Also, this survey showed that 29% of those with less than 9 years of schooling compared to 40% of university graduates were willing to send a child to French immersion. Sharon Lapkin (1984) described immersion parents as:

> ...secure, relatively well-educated members of the majority culture who know how to become informed on bilingual education, insist on the implementation of immersion programs and monitor its effectiveness by keeping abreast of research studies. (p.4)

In a study of grade nine students in New Brunswick, Lapkin and Swain (1985) found that "...more fathers (34.3/16.7) have university degrees, as do the mothers (24.6/17). More fathers (17.3/7.6) are professionals; more early immersion mothers (17.8/5.6) are semi-professional" (p.50-51).

Rita Bienvenue (1983), who conducted a study of parents in Manitoba, also concluded that French immersion parents tended to be

more highly educated than their counterparts in the regular English stream. In Bienvenue's study, 28% of mothers of the immersion population had university degrees compared to 12% of the comparison group. Significant differences also existed for fathers' education.

Olson and Burns (1983) documented the high socio-economic status of French immersion students in northeastern Ontario and showed significant differences in mean scores on family income and education. They concluded that as a group, French immersion students come from, by northern Ontario standards, upper socio-economic backgrounds.

> While educational levels are not as skewed as income and are not as great as those reported in the literature on southern Immersion parents, the educational level of immersion parents...is high compared to national, provincial, and particularly to northern Ontario norms. (Burns 1982, p.12)

A report from the Ottawa Board of Education (Trites and Price, 1986) further supported the view that the socio-economic status of the fathers, mothers, and families of the French Immersion students was higher than those of students enrolled in the regular English program. Olson and Burns (1983) attest that their findings "...conform quite well with those reported in Hamilton, North York, Ottawa, Carleton, and other boards in Ontario (Eric, 1980), where French immersion students enjoy higher socio-economic status..." (p.4)

The limited data available on income and occupational status was contradictory. Bienvenue's (1983) comparative study in Manitoba showed that occupational status and income do not differ

from one set of parents to the other. Bienvenue concluded that children in French immersion programs came from a variety of socio-economic strata. On the other hand, although Burns (1982) reported a clustering of French immersion parents' scores (using the Pineo-Porter scale) within the middle-status ranges, he believed these groups would form the core of their communities' "upper" social structure. According to Burns, this meant there was an over-representation of children in immersion whose parents were merchants, active members in the community, lawyers, doctors, dentists or members of other professions.

**Personal and social/community influences on decision-making**

Almost three-quarters (74%) of Canadians said that children living in their province should learn the other official language (Environics Poll, 1990). Most Canadians agreed that all citizens have the right to learn both official languages of Canada (Ardanaz, 1988). In order for their children to become bilingual, parents have demanded quality French programming and for many this means immersion.

Data from Bienvenue's study (1983) suggested that 72% of parents in the regular English program and all French immersion parents have deliberated on issues related to the choice of educational program for their child. For many parents much thought concerning the social, emotional, and intellectual ability of their children and the location and benefits of the programs preceded

their decision. Many of these parents have availed themselves of the information gathered over the past two decades of immersion education. But this is not always the case. Lemire (1989) reported that six out of twelve principals in Alberta described the French immersion program as: "stylish, trendy, prestigious, elitist, the 'in thing', keeping up with the Joneses" (Lemire, 1989, p.92). One principal even stated "...a number of parents like the kind of students who are in these programs or schools" (Lemire, 1989, p. 92). Principals in this study suggested a lack of commitment and support from parents who select the program for these reasons and indicated that their children usually transferred into the English program. The extent to which the 'Yuppie' phenomenon is a factor in decision-making has not been studied.

Gibson (1985), a parent with children in immersion, and Carey (1984), iterated some common parental concerns regarding the choice of immersion for children. Parents may be nervous or frustrated about their ability to do homework with their child, or to understand the teacher or a conversation between the teacher and their child. Unfortunately, at the first sign of difficulty, parents who are over-anxious, usually transfer their children to the English program where they have to cope with lowered self-esteem and a sense of failure.

In a comparison of both sets of parents, Bienvenue (1983) distinguished them based on 'positiveness' toward many issues related to immersion. The results of the Environics survey (1990) supported Bienvenue's findings. In a summary of results,

Canadian Parents for French reported that:

> ...parents with children in immersion programs appear to be more satisfied (between 92% and 95%) than those with children studying French as a subject. Over three quarters (77%) of all anglophone parents with children studying French were satisfied with the instruction available: 35% were very satisfied and 42% were somewhat satisfied. Only 12% were either not very (8%) or not at all (4%) satisfied" (Environics, 1990, p.4).

Except for these studies, the influence of the community and personal factors that relate to decision-making remain unstudied in a comparative context.

## Parental aspirations, attitudes, and involvement

There has been extensive and convincing evidence regarding the critical role of parents in the development and education of their children (Becker, 1985 as cited in Ziegler, 1987; Henderson, 1988; Ziegler, 1987; Bynner, 1972). The Department of Education of Alberta has responded to this research by calling upon school boards to encourage parents to establish school councils. According to the Alberta School Act, 1988, if parents do not initiate the organization of a school council, it is recommended that school officials direct principals to call an initial meeting.

### Parental aspirations

One of the main findings of the Plowden study (1964) in England on the inter-relationships between home and school characteristics and school attainment "...was that parents'

aspirations for their children had a stronger relationship with children's achievement than any of the other characteristics of the home and school included in the study" (Bynner, 1972, p. 13). According to Bynner, aspirations were highest in the professional group and lowest in the unskilled group. However, a surprisingly high level of aspiration existed among the least skilled manual workers. Bynner believed that children of unskilled parents would fail to realize the goals set for them because working class parents tend to be 'out of step' with certain school values in comparison with other parents (Bynner, p. 21). Olson and Burns (1983) contended that middle-class parents place more emphasis on education as necessary for a career, which in turn provides greater opportunity for a stable economic future. They also are more positive about change (Olson and Burns, 1983).

## Parental attitudes

In a study by Stephen Carey (1984), parents of English program students expressed concern that the French immersion program might be an 'upsetting or confusing experience' for their children. Carey reported that "...several parents were sure that their child could not cope in the French Immersion program because of learning or personality problems" (p.252). Concerns such as these led Weber and Tardif (1990) to examine, in an ethnographic study over two years, children's experience in French immersion kindergarten. They summarized that they "...could not find any evidence to

support the hypothesis that beginning immersion kindergarten is more stressful for children than beginning regular kindergarten" (p.56). Weber and Tardif (1990) explained that young children are more tolerant of ambiguity than adults, are accustomed to not understanding everything adults say, do not feel socially awkward about not understanding, and are not as reluctant to ask for help. In support of their arguments, Weber and Tardif (1990) cited the research of Gardner and Lambert, (1972) and Krashen (1982), which showed "...that social and psychological factors can play an important role in the acquisition of a second language" (p.56). Weber and Tardif suggested that adults possibly project their fears regarding second-language learning situations onto children without questioning whether children experience social interactions in the same way as adults. Weber and Tardif's (1990) analysis of classroom speech and interviews revealed that, to make sense of their environment, children relied on " 'the scaffolding of meaning' (Bruner, 1975) provided by Teacher's paralanguage (gestures, body movement, intonation, and expression) and by concrete materials, pictures, symbols and rituals" (p.58).

Studies of older students in immersion (grade 5 and 6), are consistent in showing that they are happy with the immersion approach [Swain and Lapkin (1982), Lambert and Tucker (1972), Genesee (1978), as cited in Genesee, 1983]. A study by Genesee in 1978 indicated that the average rating of the immersion program was 1.55 by early immersion students, and 1.72 by late immersion students on a scale from 1 (very happy to have taken the program),

to 7 (very unhappy to have taken the program), (Genesee, 1990). Also, 82% and 77% of the above groups respectively, said they would recommend it to their younger brothers and sisters. In a summary of conclusions that could be made with some certainty, Stern, et al. (1976), wrote that "...Immersion programs appear to be consistent with healthy emotional and social development" (p.1).

Carey also clearly discriminated between the attitudes of the two groups of parents regarding confidence in their children's academic ability. This is a powerful difference in view of the important influence that parental attitudes have on aspirations and the effect this has on student motivation (Lavallee, 1975), academic achievement and language acquisition (Plowden, 1967 cited in Bynner, 1972; Gardner and Lambert, 1972, cited in Carey, 1984; LeBlanc, 1985). With respect to the French immersion program in particular, Guttman (1983) purported:

> ...academic success in French immersion programs is the result not of socioeconomic class per se, but of the match between the motivational and educational aspirations and abilities of the child and the motivational and learning atmosphere that can be provided by the teacher and school. (p.17)

## Parental involvement in children's education

Another marked difference between parent groups, as noted by Carey (1984), was in time spent reading to their children. Several studies have confirmed that reading aloud to children is strongly associated with their reading achievement [Almy (1949), Sutton (1964), Clark, (1976). Durkin (1978), Wells (1981), as cited in

Romney, Romney and Braun, 1989]. Also, findings by Cummins, suggested a causal relationship between parents hearing their children read and reading attainment. Cummins even suggested the following:

> ...that staffing allocations currently provided for remedial work in primary grades might be better employed, at least in part, in organizing contact and collaboration between class teachers and parents on specific teaching matters, and that this might prevent many children from falling behind with their reading in the first place. (CPF National Newsletter, Spring 1988, p.5)

This position is supported by Feitelson, Kita, and Goldstein (1989) who reported that children who had been read to several times a week improved in many areas of reading (cited in Romney et al., 1989).

Suzanne Ziegler reviewed 37 research studies between 1981 and 1986 on the effect of parental involvement on student achievement at the elementary and secondary levels. Ziegler (1987) concluded that parental involvement in almost any form improves student achievement and that "...school personnel can intervene positively, effectively, and efficiently to teach most parents to be as effective as some parents already are" (p.9).

Ziegler (1987) prepared a paper used in the development of a written policy which addressed both homework and home/school links in Toronto. The intention of the policy was to strengthen the commitment of parents and school personnel as partners in the schooling process based on "...evidence that suggests no other single focus has the potential to be as productive for students as the close linking of home and school of parents and teachers"

(p.4). Ziegler contended that homework is a very important example of a home-school communication link and of concern to all parents.

Anglophone parents of children in immersion provide their children with guidance instead of direct assistance with homework (Gibson, 1985). This is particularly troublesome for parents of children with learning disabilities who have sometimes resorted to hiring tutors. But most parents have discovered ways to meet this challenge (Whale, 1990). As Judy Gibson (1985), a uni-lingual parent and a long-term member of CPF said: "Of course, it would be cozier if I could just give them the answers but this way we both have to think" (p.15). Peggy Wightman (1979) explained that experience has shown these problems to be minimal because immersion teachers are very willing to talk to parents, are aware of the unilingual home background and consider this fact when assigning homework. Interestingly, Swain, Lapkin, and Andrew, (1981) found that children in grades four to seven in immersion had more effective work-study skills than their English counterparts.

Parental involvement at school is also valuable. The findings from an intensive study of parental involvement in four federal Education Programs in the U.S.A. support the belief that meaningful parental involvement benefits the schools, parents, and children (Lyons, Robbins, Smith, 1983). The investigators cited the following positive effects because of parental participation in school activities:

1) Children were better behaved and showed greater diligence in efforts to learn.

2) Teachers and principals revealed more positive attitudes toward the children and the parents.

3) Administrators discovered concerns and were in a better position to respond to needs.

4) Parents influenced and contributed to the education of their children.

They also stated that children whose parents helped them at home achieved better in school (Lyons, Robbins, Smith, 1983).

French immersion parents have been outstanding in their commitment to the program and in their provision of resources both human and material, where necessary, in schools throughout Canada. "Get involved and stay involved" is the message from Deborah Whale (1990), an active member at the local, provincial, and national levels of Canadian Parents for French (p.25). Stanutz (1985), a principal, stated: "On any given day in an immersion school, there may be as many volunteers as teachers, and at special events, even more" (p.33). Also, in Lemire's study (1989), two-thirds of the principals of schools with immersion programs, indicated a very high level of parental involvement and volunteering including: library assistance, supervision on field trips, clerical work, fund-raising, social activities, newsletters, contests, participation in parent advisory councils, etc. Only one principal noted a decrease in involvement, which he attributed to the establishment and good regulation of the program and more parents in the work force. Generally, principals believed that parents were very interested in their children's education and wanted to

visit the school frequently. One principal of a large dual-track school shared this view:

> The immersion program adds to the P.R. role because you have to convince people that their kids are getting the same kind of education...not being short-changed...that takes a lot of time...I have a major job counselling these parents, encouraging them to keep their kid in the program and at the same time saying we have to have a happy youngster here.... (Lemire, 1989, p.90-91)

Educators have generally recognized that the involvement, support, and assistance of parents in the political, curricular and extra-curricular areas of immersion have enhanced the quality of the program and contributed ultimately to its success.

**Ethnicity and language**

Canada's 1986 Census figures showed that 62% of the total population have English as a mother tongue, 25% have French as a mother tongue, and 13% have a language other than English or French as a mother tongue. Of those whose mother tongue is English, most live in provinces or territories other than Quebec; of those whose mother tongue is French, most live in Quebec. However, there are significant 'official-language minorities' in every region.

With respect to minority groups, researchers are comparing the effect of maintaining and enhancing language skills in the mother tongue with the effect of replacing the mother tongue with the language of the dominant culture. According to Cummins (1978-79), early, poorly designed studies comparing unilingual children with bilingual children led educators and parents to believe that the

risks of bilingualism were great. For example, Lambert and Tucker (1972) quoted the following from a brief from the Association of (English-speaking) Catholic principals of Montreal (1969):

> We are of the opinion that the average child cannot cope with two languages of instruction and to try to do so leads to insecurity, language interference, and academic retardation. (cited in Cummins 1978-79, p.41)

Studies on French immersion programs since have supported exactly the opposite conclusion. Why? Using Lambert's (1975) distinction between additive and subtractive bilingualism, as a base, Cummins (1978-79) researched bilingualism and educational development in Anglophone and minority Francophone groups in Canada. His studies suggested that bilingualism can accelerate aspects of academic and cognitive development if a child reaches a certain threshold level of linguistic competence in both languages. "The attainment of a lower threshold level of bilingual competence would be sufficient to avoid any negative cognitive effects, but the attainment of a second, higher level of bilingual competence may be necessary for accelerated cognitive growth" (Cummins, 1978-79, p.42). Thus, if minority language children fail to develop a sufficiently high level of competence in the language of the majority culture (community's main language) their educational achievement may be hindered by their enrollment in a French immersion program. Ideally, Cummins would say, children of minority groups should be educated first in their mother tongue until their native language skills are firmly established. According to Lapkin (1984), no large-scale study has been done on children of immigrants enrolled in immersion programs.

In terms of ethno-linguistic diversity, Bienvenue's study in Manitoba in 1983 suggested that French immersion programs draw from a diversity of cultural and linguistic groups. Her results suggested a slightly higher proportion of French Canadians (16% for French and 7% for English) among the mothers in the sample of immersion parents but similar proportions of Anglo, French and other ethnic backgrounds among the fathers. Also, her data suggested a slightly lower proportion of 'foreign born' (15% versus 23%) and of non-English, non-French mother tongues (16% versus 27%) in the immersion program. According to Bienvenue, a limitation of the study was that it did not include parents whose children were in German or Ukrainian bilingual programs.

**Socio-political issues**

Connolly and Bruner (1974) spoke of a "Hidden Curriculum in the Home", which in their opinion make comparisons between immersion and regular program students difficult. Responses by parents in Bienvenue's study (1983) to issues such as: Official Bilingualism, multi-culturalism, the value of acquiring fluency in French and attitudes toward French Canadians, indicated that immersion parents are generally more positive than are their counterparts. For example, 71% of immersion parents agreed with the principles of Official Bilingualism while only 45% of the regular program parents agreed. In addition, only 10% of immersion parents believed that the Official Language Act ought <u>not</u> to apply

to Western Canada compared to 29% of parents from the English program. Also, 68% of immersion parents agreed that Canadians should make more of an effort to learn the French language while only 39% of parents of children in the regular stream agreed. Furthermore, French immersion parents were more positive regarding Quebec in Confederation, and the school and language rights of French Manitobans. Moreover, they were more supportive of multiculturalism policies. Finally, the differences were smaller, but nonetheless evident, regarding the importance of learning a second language - 88% of the immersion sample agreed compared to 71% of their counterparts (Bienvenue, 1983).

According to Fortier (1990), the Commissioner of Official Languages, linguistic tensions exist both in Canada and the United States. He cited Califa's statement regarding the English only movement in the U.S.A. and the study of attitudes on language questions by Berry and Bourcier, of Queen's University in eastern Ontario, to suggest that the same dynamics may be present in the English-only group in Canada. He believes that both cultural and economic insecurities are significant factors in shaping opinion. In the Canadian study that focused on the attitudes of members of the Alliance for the Research of English in Canada (APEC), researchers highlighted the presence and role of ethnic prejudice in attitudes toward questions regarding official languages (Fortier, 1990). Berry and Bourcier concluded that APEC members' attitudes on bilingualism provided a "...relatively socially acceptable opportunity to voice their views about French Canadians"

(cited in Fortier, 1990, p. 4). Fortier (1990) added that "opposition to official language policy comes disproportionately from those over 60 years of age and those with relatively less education" (p.4).

The debate over the Meech Lake Accord in June 1990 focused on language and ethnic issues. The linguistic and educational status of minority groups and the federal Official Languages Act were being tested. Canadians were asked to take a stand and results showed discontent with the national policies on these issues.

**Myths/realities of immersion and core French**

**Myth/Reality 1:** Children studying 'core French' will be functionally bilingual by the end of grade 12.

Core French is a program in which French is taught as a subject in an otherwise English language curriculum for 20 - 40 minutes per day beginning at various grade levels across the country. Alberta has a 12-year and a 9-year core French program. The current 9-year program, used at Mountain View School, begins with 30 minutes of instruction each day from grade 4 to grade 12. Variations of the basic core program include enhanced, enriched, and extended core which provide modifications such as teaching another subject in French, immersion weekends, or summer immersion camps. Occasionally core French provides a base for 'late immersion' at the grade 7 or 8 level. What is reasonable to expect of 500 - 1200 hours of instruction spread over 10 - 12 years in a

second language? Can core French be effective? LeBlanc (1985) responded to these questions with a "YES for interested students; a qualified YES for others" (p.23). But LeBlanc added that this does not mean that present core programs are producing fluent graduates. In fact, not all programs even have fluency as a serious objective. Abbott (1978-79) made the following comments on core French in Ontario:

> Some of the disappointment expressed about it is due to unwarranted expectations. Intended to give students a headstart in French that will improve their high school learning, the Core program is not designed to achieve even minimal standards of fluency. (p.68)

Results of a study by Barik and Swain (1976) showed that pupils in grades one and three in an immersion program "...reveal a considerably higher level of French oral comprehension than pupils in a regular program receiving instruction in French as a second language" (p.1). In a study in Fredericton, Gray (1986) found that grade six immersion students "were superior to the Core French students in all aspects of French; indeed, in some French skills they had surpassed the grade twelve students by the end of grade three" (p.949). Genesee (1983), suggested that students in immersion programs achieve better than core French students because of the time differential (10,000 hours compared to 500 - 1200 hours).

LeBlanc's (1985) testing results were more promising with respect the basic verbal fluency of grade 12 core French graduates. Of 1,281 grade 12 students in New Brunswick, 33% attained level 2 or 2+ and 9.2% attained level 3 on a five point scale where

immersion graduates are expected to attain level 3 and native francophones level 5. The key, LeBlanc reported is the competency of teachers who have enthusiasm and faith in the program.

McGillivray (1985), conducted a study of 132 core French students and 853 immersion students that dealt with students' perceptions of the program they had taken, self-rating in French and plans for post-secondary education or work. Immersion students rated their program as follows: 27% as excellent, 61% as good, and 12% as poor. Core French students rated their program as follows: 16% as excellent, 68% as good, and 16% as poor. When evaluators asked which French program they would recommend to parents of young children (if early immersion, late immersion and core were all available), 80.3% of the immersion group recommended early immersion, 22.8% late immersion, and 1.7% core. Interestingly, 56.9% of core students recommended early immersion, 26.9% late immersion, and only 16.2% recommended core. With respect to their French listening, reading, writing, and speaking abilities, French immersion students appeared more confident than core French students. Also more immersion students expressed interest in pursuing studies in French at the post-secondary level.

Furthermore, in a comparison of immersion and non-immersion students, Genesee (1978), (1981), reported "...that non-immersion students felt uncomfortable and lacked confidence in situations that called for the use of French and rated their French language skills low in comparison to the ratings of the immersion students" (cited in Genesee, 1990, p.98). In an article entitled "What About

Core," Judy Gibson (1979) reported the negative reaction of students, parents, and teachers toward the core program.

Parental assessments of core French programs by Bienvenue (1983) showed that 16% of French immersion parents considered the core French program adequate whereas 50% of English parents rated the program as adequate. In addition, 75% of immersion parents believed core French could not lead to the development of bilingualism while only 43% of English parents believed the same. Bienvenue added that many core French parents indicated a real need to improve core French programs.

Canadians are about to benefit from The National Core French Study by Dr. Stern from 1985 - 1989 (Official Languages - 1990). Its results have had an influence on pedagogy at the administrative level in the province of Alberta. Unfortunately, one of the essential factors for a successful core French program - teacher fluency - has raised the issue of teacher supply. The problem encountered in many schools is that many talented core French teachers have tranferred to immersion. Consequently, teacher training and professional development are currently prime foci of attention for core and French immersion teachers (Tardif, 1985). Another problem faced by students studying core French is limited exposure and opportunity to use the language (Genesee, 1983). But, as Nicolson says "...with extra help from summer programs or exchange visits to French-speaking homes, many teachers feel that students in core French programs can also achieve useful levels of bilingualism" (Nicolson, 1989, p.34). Otherwise, students in the

program should achieve a basic competence in French but should not expect to become fluently bilingual (Hodych and Scott, 1985). Since (according to the 1990 Secretary of State figures) only 0.5% of elementary and secondary students in Canada are enrolled in immersion, it is obvious that the vast majority continue to learn French in 'core' programs. Thus the strengthening of this program seems more than warranted.

Reflecting on the core French program of the 60's, 70's, and 80's, Dr. H.H. Stern (1984) said "...Core French did not fulfill its high promise...of bilingualism that parents more or less had in mind for their children" (p.511). In fact, it was the results of the core program that convinced parent groups to find a better way to teach a second language. "In all skill areas," said Swain, "the immersion students do very well relative to other French Second Language groups" (Swain, 1990, p.75).

**Myth/Reality 2: Children in 'immersion' will be perfectly fluent in French by the end of grade 12.**

The focus of research on immersion student achievement in French, English, and subjects like mathematics during the 1970's shifted in the 1980's to the quality of immersion students' French (Lapkin and Swain, 1989). Particular attention was given to French fluency - the ability to express oneself easily, smoothly, and expressively in speech and written work.

The degree to which children become fluent in all language strands of course depends on a child's interest and ability. With respect

to fluency, Gibson (1985) added:

> Nor will your children likely be perfectly bilingual at the end of grade twelve, or "balanced bilinguals" as the linguists would say. To achieve this relatively rare state, they would require a period of "submersion" in a French milieu, and far more exposure to the language and a much greater variety of experiences than they can possibly have just in school, even in immersion....Graduates of early Immersion programs can understand, speak, read, and write French fluently and easily but not perfectly. (Gibson, p.13)

Immersion graduates are 'functionally bilingual' because many can work, live, and pursue further studies in French (Gibson, 1985). In other words, according to Morrison and Pawley (1983),the majority of immersion students can at least satisfy routine social needs and limited work needs and many can participate in conversations on practical, social, or work-related subjects.

The results of comparisons between immersion and francophone students showed that Francophone students nearly always performed better than immersion students except in listening skills. Swain reported that in the area of listening comprehension and a close test, early immersion students in grade 8 achieved as well as students whose first language was French and they continued to do as well through high school (Swain, Lapkin, and Andrew, 1981). Also, Morrison and Pawley (1983) reported that by grade 10 the early and late immersion students obtained the highest possible score on the reading, writing, and listening sections of the Public Service Commission's Language Exam and that grade 12 immersion students who took the University of Ottawa's French entrance exam, averaged 85%.

However, results reported by Swain (1990) showed that

immersion students at grade 10 performed only as well as a third of the Francophone population in reading comprehension. With respect to writing skills, Swain (1990) reported that "...of fifteen grammatical measures used in the four OISE studies, fourteen showed differences favoring Francophones" (p.73). In addition, according to Swain, the speaking skills of immersion students in both formal and informal situations were clearly distinguishable from Francophones and revealed considerable grammatical weaknesses. These results paralleled those of Lambert (1974). Furthermore, with respect to oral skills, these students did not obtain the highest possible score on the Public Service Commission Language Exam as they had in the other language skills (Morrison and Pawley, 1983).

More evidence is provided by Genesee et al.(1985), who compared the linguistic and academic development of English-speaking children at grade 4 with a French control group. Genesee found no differences between the groups in French listening comprehension and mathematics; however, French immersion students scored significantly lower than their counterparts in reading and oral expression. There were also significant differences in favor of the French control group with respect to vocabulary, originality, and the use of prepositions. In written expression, no differences were noted in spelling, punctuation, length, sentence accuracy, sentence variety, and organization. With respect to functional language proficiency, Genesee (1978-79) confirmed that early and late French immersion students' ability to decode

French (listening and reading comprehension) was almost 'native-like' while productive language skills (i.e. speaking) and knowledge of discrete linguistic rules, although good was less like that of Francophones. Gray (1981) found that immersion students at the sixth grade scored lower on all measures of French skills falling a year or more behind Francophone students on measures of French academic skills and one to three years behind on measures of French linguistic competence. These results are somewhat lower than those cited earlier, possibly (as Gray suggested) because programs in Montreal, Ottawa, and Toronto have an additional kindergarten year in French.

Supportive of the generally high subjective ratings given to immersion students during one-to-one conversations, are the results of a study involving the retelling of a story by grade 5 and 6 students [Bruck, Lambert, and Tucker, (1976) as reported in Genesee, 1983]. Genesee (1983) reported that immersion students' stories were the same as those of the French students regarding the amount and kinds of information. The communicative competence of immersion students, Genesee believed, had developed somewhat independently of their actual linguistic competence (Genesee, 1983). More evidence was provided by Adiv (1980), Harley and Swain (1977), and Swain and Lapkin (1982), as cited in Genesee (1983), who showed linguistic deficiencies in French immersion students' oral speech even though "...they were able to convey the essential message" (p.21).

These views were expounded upon by Hammerly (1990) who

described the speech of French immersion students as 'Frenglish'. Hammerly has denounced the philosophical foundation of immersion, claiming that it is an unnatural language learning environment. He has also advanced the notion of older students as more efficient learners. His stated belief that immersion students' faulty linguistic habits are so entrenched that remediation is impossible has received much criticism from advocates of immersion.

Interestingly, immersion students "...felt that their oral vocabulary and their ability to speak correctly were two aspects of their French proficiency which they would most like to improve" (Genesee, 1983, p.21-22). Thus, despite their 'flaws', immersion students are clearly able to use French in the real world and are aware of their weaknesses (Krashen, 1984).

The same pattern of weaknesses exists in writing skills (Genesee and LeBlanc, 1978, Genesee and Morcos, 1978, as cited in Genesee, 1983). Safty (1989), drawing from practical classroom experience, systematic observations and regular evaluations of immersion students' French language proficiency, provided the following conclusions:

- Generally the productive language skills of the students - i.e., speaking and writing - require more attention than their receptive skills - i.e., listening and reading.
- Use of syntax is generally problematic in that their sentence structure often reveals internalized language skills of the English syntax....
- Faulty use of prepositions is usually the most frequent error and the most difficult to correct...
- Although verb conjugation, particularly the passe compose and l'imparfait, is usually an area of

> difficulty for the Grade 5 students, it becomes much less so by Grade 7 and the majority of students have little difficulty with it. What difficulty there remains has to do with the correct usage of these verbs within sentences, as well as differentiation as to when to use the auxiliary verbs (avoir - etre) in the passe compose.
>
> Frequently, students who exhibited good command of their first language (English) proved more receptive to corrective strategies particularly in sentence formation. Bilingual students seem to have a common underlying proficiency (Kessler, 1971; Cummins and Swain 1986) which provides the development of both languages in an interdependent way...(p. 549).

**Myth/Reality 3:** The English skills of children in immersion suffer.

Because English instruction in early immersion programs is not introduced until grade 2, 3, or 4, parents and educators were concerned about the development of first-language skills. Consequently, the English skills of children in immersion have been the focus of evaluation since its inception. Many research studies were conducted in the 1970's and early 1980's which used English students in the regular program for comparative purposes. The results were very consistent, positive and moderately successful in allaying parental concerns.

On a task that assessed the children's sensitivity to the needs of the listener, the French immersion children were, according to Genesee (1983), more sensitive probably because their school experience involved adjustment to a second language. Achievement results showed that in English speaking and listening comprehension, skills were similar for both groups although formal

English instruction began later (Lambert and Tucker, 1972, as cited in Swain, 1990; Genesee, 1983). In view of the lack of formal instruction in reading and writing (literacy skills) in English, it was not surprising that immersion students lagged behind their peers in some aspects of English such as: word knowledge, word discrimination, reading comprehension and technical skills such as spelling, capitalization, and punctuation [Swain and Barik (1976), as cited in Swain, 1990]. Genesee cited Polick's (1973) and Lambert and Tucker's (1972) studies to point out that the grade one students were more competent than one might expect considering their lack of formal training (Genesee, 1983).

In a linguistic analysis of stories written by grade 3 English and French immersion students, Swain (1975) found that abilities in spelling, punctuation, capitalization, and vocabulary use were comparable, and in addition, immersion students used more varied sentence structure (as cited in Swain, 1990). Other researchers supported Swain's results. They showed that after one year of English Language Arts instruction, immersion students' results were equal to English students on those tasks in which they lagged such as: reading comprehension, vocabulary, grammatical knowledge, and writing (Genesee and Stanley, 1976; Shapson and Day, 1983, as cited in Sahut, 1987; Taschow and Cicansky, 1981; Research Office - York Region Board, 1984). In Fredericton, where English Language Arts is not introduced until grade 4, Gray (1981) found that immersion students were behind their peers until grade 3. Then they progressed rapidly through grade 5 to catch up with their peers in

grade 6 in all aspects of English Language Arts except spelling. Genesee (1983) remarked that though immersion students temporarily lag in spelling until grade 4 or 5, once they have achieved parity, it is maintained through secondary school. Barik and Swain (1978) attested that "by the end of Grade 5, immersion children perform as well as or better than their English-educated peers on all aspects of English language skills measured by standardized tests" (Swain, 1990, p.70). A study in Manitoba using the Canadian Test of Basic Skills (as cited in Sahut, 1987) provided similar results. In this study, grade 6 immersion students achieved above the average national norms. Interestingly, Swain (1978) suggested that the English skills of children in immersion programs do not seem affected by the amount of school instruction time in English. McDougall and Bruck (1976) and MacNamara, Svarc and Horner (as cited in Cummins, 1978-79) agreed. Genesee attributed the acquisition of English literacy skills within such a short time (1 year) to "...certain processes which are basic to reading and that once learned can be applied to reading any or almost any language" (Genesee, 1979, as cited in Genesee, 1983, p.16). Likewise, Cummins has proposed "...that there is a common proficiency underlying literacy skills in the case of bilinguals" (as cited in Genesee, 1983, p.16).

Also interesting were the results from a study in Regina in which grade 3 French immersion students completed a mathematics test in English. Their results were equal to those of comparable groups in the regular program. This was somewhat surprising,

considering that mathematics instruction had been in French (Cummins, Lapkin, Swain, 1981).

The focus of recent studies has been on the effect of second language learning on children's metalinguistic development as it relates to thinking, problem solving, and intellectual growth. Cummins suggested that "...bilingual children exhibit greater sensitivity to linguistic memory and may be more flexible in their thinking than are unilingual children" (Cummins and Swain 1986, as cited in Cummins, 1990, p.89). Based on this research, Cummins (1990) concluded:

> The development of additive bilingualism and biliteracy skills entails no negative consequences for children's academic, linguistic, or intellectual development. On the contrary, although not conclusive, the evidence points in the direction of subtle metalinguistic, academic, and intellectual benefits for bilingual children. (p.91)

**Myth/Reality 4:** Immersion is only for bright or advanced children. Children who have difficulty in the areas of speech/language or learning/personality before entering school could find it difficult to cope with immersion.

> The research on access of students with special characteristics (learning disabled, gifted, etc.) to immersion has been scant, and although there have been recent attempts to study students transferring out of immersion (Hart, Lapkin and Swain, 1989; Morrison, 1989), this is an area where much remains to be learned. (Lapkin and Swain, 1989, p.18).

Using the limited research available, a discussion of the suitability of the French immersion program for three specific groups of children follows: children with specific learning

disabilities, the 'slow learner' (children with below average academic ability), and 'gifted' children. There are opposing views on the question of which types of children should go into immersion (Burnett, 1990; Genesee, 1983; Bruck, 1979; Jones, 1984; Wiss, 1989). According to Bruck (1979) one view is that only 'typical' or above average children with no problems should enter. Bruck shares another position "...that access to immersion programs should be made available to most children regardless of cultural, linguistic, emotional or physical status" (Bruck, 1979, p.42). The first position supports an elitist's view while the second favors the view that "...those children who experience difficulty in French immersion would experience academic difficulty in the regular unilingual program as well" [Bruck (1978), (1982), Cummins (1984), Wiss (1987), (1988b), (1988), in press as cited in Wiss (1989), p. 516].

Unfortunately for practioners, two principle researchers in the field of learning disabilities have opposite views on the appropriateness of French immersion programs for learning/language disabled children. Ronald Trites of the Royal Ottawa Hospital and his associate M. A. Price, have undertaken three separate studies in this field and have concluded that children who have experienced problems in primary French immersion have a unique learning difficulty due to a maturational lag of the temporal lobe region of the brain that disappears at about age nine or ten (Trites, 1986; Trites and Price, 1978-79). "It is well established in neuropsychological literature that the temporal lobes are important

important brain structures for subserving language, memory and auditory perceptual functions" (Trites and Price 1978-79, p.79). Consequently, to avoid early failure in school Trites and Price suggested a screening process. Their results, they wrote "...indicate the importance of identifying which children have this specific maturational defect before they enter an early French immersion program so that such children could be educated in their native language first and enter an immersion program only after nine or ten years of age" (Trites and Price, 1978-79, p.80). Trites (1986) also claimed that children having difficulties in French immersion develop better English language skills when transferred into an English program than those who remain in French immersion.

However, the conclusions of other researchers, notably Bruck, 1978, 1979, 1980; Genesee, 1983; Cummins, 1983; Cummins, 1984 as cited in Burnett, 1990; and Harley, 1976, are diametrically opposed to those of Trites. For example, Bruck's results suggested that children with language learning disabilities in French immersion when compared to a carefully selected group of language disabled children in the English program, continue to develop facility in their first language, learn their basic academic skills at the predicted rate, exhibit no severe behavioral problems and acquire greater competency in French (Bruck, 1979). Other researchers have also commented on Bruck's research. Genesee (1983) noted:

> The end of grade three indicated that it was taking the disabled children in both programs longer to attain basic literacy and academic skills than their nondisabled peers, as would be expected from their disability, but

> that the disabled children in the immersion program had developed linguistic, cognitive and academic skills at a rate similar to that at which they would develop were they placed in an all English classroom. At the same time the disabled immersion students showed good progress in French language learning to the point that they could cope with the classroom instruction in French within the limits posed by their disability. (p.28)

Cummins' (1983) hypothesis of a common underlying proficiency supported Bruck's conclusion that a language disabled child will experience similar problems in the English program. It also provided support for remaining in French immersion rather than transferring to an English program. Burnett (1990) added: "...both Bruck (1985b) and Trites (1986) report that a child's self-esteem drops after a transfer from French Immersion to English" (p.81). As Morrison (1989) stated: " The transfer process may be a traumatic experience for those children who see themselves or are seen by their parents as having failed, in spite of evidence to the contrary." (p.3)

Furthermore, according to Harley (1976) and Genesee (1983), "Trites' interpretations of his results are open to question" (Genesee, p.46). Genesee (1983) focussed on the construct validity of the so-called 'motivational lag' that Trites claimed is characteristic of immersion drop-outs and the predictive validity of the test battery used. He commented, "Trites' claim that difficulties faced by these students are due to a unique developmental lag is overstated" (Genesee, 1983, p.47). While, Genesee (1983) acknowledged the validity of Trites' suggestion that children showing evidence of a 'maturation lag' should be placed in an English program and in late French immersion, he emphasized that

this should occur only if this difficulty is specific to performance in the immersion program and not the English program. Furthermore, he said, "...there is no evidence in Trites' studies to indicate that these children would not experience the same difficulties and/or lag in the regular program" (Genesee, 1983, p.48).

On the one hand, the conclusions point to early screening to avoid failure and on the other hand to remedial services in French immersion for those experiencing problems.

> Remedial specialists agree that if the learning disability is not severe, if it is diagnosed at an early stage (grade 2 or earlier) and if there are adequate support services, then there is no reason for a child to leave French immersion. (Latchford, 1989, as cited in Burnett, 1990, p.83)

Most importantly, Burnett (1990) added "...it is important for parents to realize that a child cannot escape a learning disability by leaving French immersion" (p.81). According to Burnett (1990), parents of children with severe learning disabilities, who cannot assist in French or for whom hiring a tutor is impossible, should consider transferring their child to a regular English program particularly if the child is unhappy.

Wiss (1989) has suggested the existence of a group of unilingual English children whose cognitive and linguistic skills are so delayed that they may not benefit from an immersion program. Her recommendation is that until empirical data is available to support the existence of this group and valid methods are found to identify them, learning disabled children must not be counselled out of early immersion because this may be the best way for them to

become bilingual. Bruck (as cited in Wiss, 1989) proposed that further research in immersion include the development of a diagnostic battery of tests to distinguish developmentally delayed children from those whose problems reflect specific cognitive processing deficits - those children who would experience difficulty in either language of instruction. Regarding the appropriateness of immersion, Lapkin and Swain (1984) stated:

> There is a common misperception that immersion education is only for children of above-average intelligence. In fact, the studies that address the relationship of IQ to academic success in immersion suggest the opposite: any child can benefit from an immersion programme. (Language and Society, Ottawa: The Commissioner of Official Languages, No. 12, Research Update, 1984, p.50 )

Unlike the learning disabled child, the slow-learner is a student who is slower than average in all areas of development because of less than average intelligence. Genesee (1983) examined the relationship between success in immersion and academic ability and concluded that "below average students in immersion were not differentially handicapped in their first language development and academic achievement as a result of being in the program" (p. 41). In addition, they scored significantly higher than their counterparts in the regular English program on all French language tests. As expected, they scored lower than the average and above-average immersion students on French tests involving literacy-based skills (i.e., reading) and skills that reflect knowledge of the formal structure of the language (i.e., grammar) but scored at the same level on tests assessing interpersonal communication skills (i.e., speaking and listening comprehension) (Genesee, 1983).

Cummins (1979), Dockrell and Brosseau (1967), Gardner and Lambert (1972) - as cited in Genesee (1983) provided support for the distinction between literacy-based and interpersonal communication skills achievement . Their results showed the following:

> ...that IQ is not the exclusive or necessarily the most important correlate of second language achievement... are also compatible with what we know about first language acquisition, namely, that all children, with a few pathological exceptions, acquire functional communicative competence in their native language even before receiving academic instruction. (p.43)

Bourgeois (1988), a reporter for the Canadian Living Magazine, quoted Merrill Swain the head of the Modern Language Center at the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education (OISE) as saying:

> I think just about any kid can succeed in immersion. That includes children with learning disabilities, children whose mother tongue is neither English nor French, and those who score as bright, average and below average on intelligence tests... But Swain says there are exceptions; children with hearing problems and children who have difficulty speaking or understanding their mother tongue probably will not succeed in a French immersion program. (p. W7)

Gibson (1985), a long-time member of Canadian Parents for French, supported Swain's conclusions with the following statements:

> Children who already display problems with communication before entering school could find it difficult to cope with immersion....Likewise, a child who is unable to communicate in a manner normal for his/her age level perhaps should not yet be introduced to a second language.... (p.12)

With respect to a child with a serious speech impairment, Gibson (1985) advised consultation with a speech therapist. She commented on the suitability of the program for such students:

> While some problems might actually be helped by this emphasis on correct oral production and the 'fresh start' of a new language, others might be worsened, resulting in

frustration and failure. (Gibson, p.14)

Peggy Wightman (1979) also stated: "It has been suggested that some mild speech problems and poor speech habits may be improved by early immersion through the additional practise in sound discrimination and reproduction" (p.61).

With respect to gifted children, Gibson (1985) suggested, "...if you are considering immersion only because your child is particularly bright or advanced, you may eventually be disappointed" (p.14). Researchers agree, that at first, the new experience will be challenging but because these children learn quickly, they soon need additional stimulation (Sigler and Tourond, 1985). Their ability to operate at the higher levels of thinking (analysis, synthesis and evaluation) makes it imperative that they gain a high threshold of language competence as quickly as possible so they can be provided with tasks that demand higher levels of cognitive processing. How is this best accomplished? In studies of early, partial, and total immersion programs, Cummins (1979) reached the following conclusion:

> Studies relating bilingualism to cognitive development during this period suggest that the bilingual experience can have either positive or negative effects depending on the levels of competence which children develop in L1 and L2. Since the total immersion program results in high levels of French competence at no cost to the development of English skills, it seems likely to accelerate cognitive and academic progress to a greater extent than the partial immersion program where French skills develop less rapidly due to the less intensive exposure to French in the early grades. (p.33)

Interestingly, when the North York Board of Education offered parents of gifted and talented elementary students a choice between

an enriched English curriculum or a French immersion program, over 50% opted for the enriched program stating that "...while they were still highly committed to French Language learning, they felt their children needed a further enriched classroom environment to that being offered in the French immersion program" (Guttman, 1983, p.18).

Creativity, a component of giftedness, has also been studied with respect to bilingualism. Bilinguals appear to be more original (an important aspect of creativity) than monolinguals [Torrance (1970), Genesee (1974), Lambert (1978), as cited in Wightman, (1979)]. Collinson (1989) has suggested that next to nothing has been done for the gifted in immersion, but she predicts, "the next trend in immersion will be that of gifted education" (p.25).

Myth/Reality 5: French Immersion costs more.

Taxpayers are concerned with the economic implications of administering the immersion program (McInnis, 1989, CPF Assiniboine South Chapter). With respect to cost, Margaret Bruck (1978-1979) said: "French immersion programs have been shown repeatedly to be a most successful, effortless, and inexpensive vehicle through which children acquire commendable proficiency in French" (p.87). McGillivray (1983) provided support for Bruck's statement:

> Besides, immersion, once it is established, with normal class sizes, costs very little more than regular English programs. This never quite works out in practice but certainly immersion is much less expensive than a core French program and, in terms of benefits per dollar there is no comparison. (p.2)

According to the 1990 Secretary of State figures "...the federal government spends less than half of 1% of its total budget on official languages. Of this, by far the largest expenditure goes toward offering language-learning opportunities for youth in our schools" (Official Languages, 1990). These bilateral agreements with all provinces, which result in federal transfer grants to provincial Ministries of Education, have played an important role in expansion of immersion (Burns, 1982). According to Mr. R. Slevinsky, Senior Consultant - Official Languages Program (Alberta), contributions from the Federal Government are classified as either **infrastructure**, **complementary**, or **supplementary**. Slevinsky estimated that for the 1990-91 fiscal year, Alberta received a Federal contribution of $11,000,000. Of this, $4,000,000 was directed toward kindergarten to grade 12 immersion and $3,200,000 to grade 1 to 12 core French programs. The remainder was directed to post-secondary education and minority (Francophone) programs. However, it was not until three years ago that the funding for immersion in our school district was directed to the schools which operated the program. This situation was not unusual. Burns (1982) stated that French immersion teachers have been "frequently frustrated by...the tendency of funding for immersion not to find its way to the classroom setting level of the system" (p.25). According to 1990 figures provided by the Department of Education in Alberta, French immersion students qualified for the following amounts for the 1990-91 school year: elementary $344., junior/ senior high $420.

The immersion principals interviewed by Lemire (1989) emphasized the importance of provincial and federal funding using terms such as: "...very important, indispensable, absolutely essential, imperative that we receive all the monies available to promote the programs" (p.97). Five principals believed that cutbacks would definitely impact the program and two believed they would put the program in jeopardy because of extra costs. The principals pointed to the nature of the program for these costs. In Alberta, from grade two or three, each child takes two comprehensive language arts programs. This makes a bilingual library collection and additional basic resource materials in both languages necessary. As McGillivary (1979) said "...the word 'additional' is preciser here, because most of the English books normally found in elementary school libraries and classrooms will still be required" (p.107). In addition, French texts, workbooks, and materials such as audio-visual equipment, tend to cost more [Nicolson (1989) quotes 15% and Lemire (1989) quoted 30%]. Cultural performances, recruitment of personnel, and translation are also additional expenses. Unfortunately, most lead classes diminish in size resulting in a need for staffing support. Burns (1982) made many recommendations regarding budgetary considerations which aimed to heighten the awareness and responsibilites of the federal government, boards, directors, principals, parents, and the Minister of Education with respect to the allocation of transfer money. Burns wanted the appropriate authorities " to ensure that these funds were used for materials and in-service directly in

support of classroom learning" (Burns 1982, p.32).

From another point of view, it is possible that offering an immersion program in a school division results in lower costs than providing a regular English program. The major cost in providing an education for children is teacher salaries. Currently, when one examines the average salary of immersion teachers and compares it to the average salary of teachers in the regular English program, the difference is remarkably less for immersion teachers. Add to this, the monies received by school divisions as a result of transfer agreements with the federal government and the cost of the immersion program currently may be less than that of a regular English program.

In a study in Manitoba, Bienvenue (1983) found that parents of students in the regular English program believed that "...the money spent on French Immersion would be better spent improving the teaching of French throughout the entire school system" (p.16). A careful analysis of the costs of immersion at each level of government through to the school system would provide an interesting account of the real costs of providing an immersion program.

**Attitudes toward second language acquisition**

According to a poll by Environics (1990), 74% of Canadians say that children in their province should learn the other official language. Sixty-nine percent of anglophones across the country

want Canadian children to learn French and to become bilingual. Support for second language education is 56% in Alberta and 61% in Manitoba. These results are lower than those reported by Bienvenue in Manitoba. In Bienvenue's study, 88% of immersion parents and 71% of parents with students in the regular English program agreed that learning a second language is important. Also, only 45% of parents with children in the English program agree with the official language policy compared to 71% of their counterparts (Bienvenue, 1983). In addition, Bienvenue (1983) found that only 39% of parents with children in the regular English program felt that "Canadians as a whole should make more of an effort to learn the French language" (p. 14).

Why do approximately 50% of Albertans want their children to learn French? The value of becoming fluent in French can be discussed in terms of its instrumental (employment), integrative (cultural), interactional (mixing with French Canadians), national/international (travelling and visiting in Quebec or abroad), and enrichment (personal intellectual growth) possiblities. Bienvenue (1983) found French immersion parents were significantly more positive than their counterparts in the regular program on all dimensions she studied (instrumental, integrative, interactional, and national/international) with the international value distinguishing the two sets of parents the most. Environics (1990) reported that English Canadians cited employment opportunities most often (49%) as the main advantage of learning French. In Alberta, 37% cited employment opportunities as a

primary advantage, 27% cited personal/ intellectual growth, 8% cited travel, and 2% cited contributing to national unity. Olson and Burns (1983) obtained similar results in a survey of parents in northern Ontario. Their findings revealed that 88% of parents mentioned increased job opportunity as the prime reason for selecting French immersion for their children. Only 43% agreed that the French immersion program assists in bringing the French and English together and more parents were willing to send their children to Quebec because of the cultural opportunity (individual enrichment) it provided, than using it as a means to promote cultural harmony [Burns and Olson (1981) as cited in Olson and Burns, 1983]. In a response to Olson and Burns' (1983), Guttman (1983) contended that they

> ...have ignored two important factors affecting parents' choice of French immersion schooling:
> 1. that French immersion takes place in a positive environment, and
> 2. that second language learning has been shown to increase one's cognitive functioning. (p.18)

Guttman's point was that poor middle-class parents look to the school system to provide something beyond what they can offer at home. According to the Environics results (1990), cited earlier, 27% of the population in Alberta (highest in Canada) cited personal/intellectual growth as the main advantage of learning French. This evidence supported Guttman's view that a significant portion of the population is concerned about personal intellectual growth. A survey of CPF members during the same period further substantiated Guttman's hypothesis. Its results showed that members of Canadian Parents for French identified cultural and

intellectual broadening (30%) as the main advantage, being bilingual as an advantage in itself (29%), and job opportunities to be most important (23%) (Manzer, 1990).

More evidence was provided by the results of a survey by the Research Office - the Division of Planning and Development of the York Region Board of Education (1984), which provided the following reasons cited by parents for enrolling children in French immersion programs:

a) the educational advantage of speaking more than one language 68%
b) bilingual persons have better employment opportunities 65%
c) bilingual persons have cultural and social advantages 60%
d) the French immersion program provides a worthwhile challenge to the child 56%

Other common reasons...being able to speak English and French is a convenience in Canada; the French immersion program appeals to the child; French is spoken in the family and social set. (p.A-2)

Max Yalden (1978-79), Commissioner of Official Languages, commented on the value of French for personal, economic, and national reasons. In summary, he suggested that being bilingual (French/English) aids in a better understanding of history - particularly Canadian history - and current issues and events. It also opens doors to employment within Canada and internationally.

According to Olson and Burns (1983), since 1972 when the federal government mandated bilingualism as a promotion criterion within the federal civil service, resentment and sometimes resistance toward French have grown. Recently, according to L'ACFA (Association of Canadian Francophones), the Alliance for

Preservation of the English Language of Canada (APEC) has circulated reports about federal expenses in the area of bilingualism. L'ACFA's response in 'Le Franco', a French newspaper (March 23, 1990) included information on budget and on the necessity of being bilingual to work for the federal government. A translation follows:

> . 0.2% of the entire federal budget is spent on promoting 'bilingualism'
>
> . The public service employs 208,300 persons in Canada. Of these 60,820 (29%) are bilingual. Of the 60,820, a total of 52,960 are located in Quebec or Ottawa. Thus 7,800 (4%) bilingual positions exist in the other provinces.
>
> . The public service in not in the hands of francophones. There are 150,000 anglophones in the federal service compared to 59,000 Francophones. Outside Quebec 95% of jobs are occupied by anglophones (104,848 out of 110, 620). Within Quebec and in the national capital 46% of jobs are occupied by anglophones (44,782 out of 97,731). Finally, note that 80% of administrative positions are occupied by anglophones (p.21).

Statistics provide one point of view. Another, as Burns and Olson (1983) pointed out as a result of their interviews, was the belief of many parents that their mobility would be enhanced by bilingualism. Olson and Burns (1983) contended that a survey of want ads in the Globe and Mail revealed that many management positions required bilingualism and that since 1972 there was more of an emphasis placed on bilingualism in upper-level management jobs by the federal and provincial civil service agencies in Canada.

When Lemire (1989) asked twelve principals to share their

perceptions on parents' motivation to enroll their children in immersion, they cited: better job opportunities; second language benefits; the trendy, elitist, prestigious nature of the program; a better education; intellectual enrichment; opportunities for travel; smaller classes and better results; and the 'better' nature of the peer group. From a parent's point of view, Judy Gibson (1979) stated:

> . Students study French to prepare themselves for future employment, travel, cultural pursuits....
>
> . Learning something of a second language will give a student a better insight into his mother tongue. He will discover that there are other ways of organizing thought, of expressing of ideas. He will have another grammatical system to contrast and compare with his own....
>
> . Being introduced to a second language will make students more interested in and appreciative of people of many cultures. (p.80-81)

"In essence," MacKinnon (1990) stated, "it expands the mind and allows for a more objective and open-minded approach to learning" (p.3).

Learning a second language though is just one facet of education. Nicolson (1989) said: " This drive to produce bilingual kids has sometimes obscured other, more fundamental aims of our schools" (p.34). In Today's Parent magazine, Nicolson (1989) cautioned parents about pushing specific marketable skills without considering a child's personality, aptitude, and interests, and reminded them of the words of the Plowden Report on education in Britain:

> The best preparation for being a happy and useful man or woman is to live fully as a child. (p.34)

Another factor that may influence a parent's choice of program could be the belief that immersion programs create an elite group or make children in them different from their friends. In an ethnographic interview in northern Ontario, Olson and Burns (1983),

> ...found strong evidence that French immersion children were elite, not only in terms of their family background, their access to an enriched curriculum, and the bilingual nature of their program, but also in their spoken accents - standard French as opposed to Canadian dialect. (p.5)

This 'elitism' they argued is due to the recruitment practices of immersion (word of mouth) and the belief of middle-class parents in education as a means to a secure economic future. They accused teachers of 'tracking-out' less able, lower SES, and problem children from their classes. Burns (1982) added that "...high SES parents are also more willing to gamble on innovations" (p.21). But, as reported by Olson and Burns (1983), "...a more diverse range of students -as measured in terms of IQ, socio-economic background, range of ethnicity, and so on - is entering the second generation French immersion cohort" (p. 8). From Burns' (1982) point of view "...immersion education has captured the imagination of the masses" (p.19) and it is critical that children from all socio-economic strata have access to French immersion programs so that differences between the classes are not perpetuated or enlarged (Olson and Burns, 1983).

Proponents of early immersion programs believe that this form of immersion program provides the most egalitarian form of bilingual education (Lapkin, 1984; Olson and Burns, 1983) because

not only the highly motivated and academically able enter. Early screening as suggested by Trites (1986) may help some students but could easily lead to the provision of immersion programming to an elite. School systems across the country have accepted Bruck's argument that almost all students can benefit from an early immersion program and are beginning to provide support services in French to meet the needs of students who are experiencing difficulty in the program (Lapkin, 1984).

Another factor that can promote elitism is transportation. The likelihood of a parent in a lower socio-economic area sending their child 'across town' to attend an immersion program, which is located in a middle-socio-economic neighborhoods, is slim (Burns, 1982). According to Burns (1982):

> ...what is required are procedures to ensure that (a) all ratepayers are knowledgeable about immersion programs, (b) children's accessibility to the programs is facilitated by boards, and (c) programs are geared to the full range of needs of students who enroll in them. (p.21)

Also, the idea of transporting children to a school that offers an immersion program may be viewed negatively when the public deems attendance at neighborhood schools important in the development of a sense of community. Bienvenue's (1983) study showed that French immersion parents were willing to have their children transported out of the neighborhood in order to participate in an immersion program while many parents of children in the regular program favored the idea of a neighborhood school. She commented "...while French Immersion may be attractive for some, the location of the school and problems of transportation are

viewed as negative..." (Bienvenue, 1983, p.29). A review of the literature, which shows an increase in immersion centers across Canada, indicates that many parents are willing to transport their children in order to place them in an immersion program.

# CHAPTER 3

# DESIGN OF THE STUDY

## The Population

The population of this study consisted of all parents (245) with students at Mountain View School in Hinton, Alberta. Their children attended kindergarten to grade seven in the English or the French Immersion program. Table 1 provides an indication of the number of eldest children in each grade and program. Table 2 indicates the number of questionnaires returned by grade and program.

**Table 1**

**Number of Eldest Children in K-7 by Program**

| Grade | K | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | Total |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| English | 6 | 9 | 15 | 3 | 8 | 8 | 10 | 30 | 89 |
| French Imm. | 17 | 18 | 20 | 22 | 22 | 19 | 20 | 14 | 152 |
| Both | | 1 | | | | | | 3 | 4 |

**Table 2**

**Number of Questionnaires Returned From K-7 by Program**

| Grade | K | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | Total |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| English | 3 | 4 | 7 | 2 | 4 | 4 | 3 | 16 | 43 |
| French Imm. | 10 | 12 | 14 | 18 | 17 | 16 | 19 | 14 | 120 |
| Both | | 1 | | | | | | 3 | 4 |

**Research procedure**

The procedure involved the issuing of a questionnaire with an unsealed envelope to parents via the eldest child in the family. A covering letter explained the purpose of the questionnaire and parents were asked to return it in a sealed envelope to their child's homeroom teacher. As the questionnaires were returned; teachers checked the children's names off the list of eldest children in their class. The investigator had planned to make a follow-up phone call to parents who had not responded if the response rate was inadequate. Since the response was acceptable and considering the sensitive nature of the topic, the investigator sent a letter of appreciation with a final deadline for submission of questionnaires to all parents. Data were gathered from May 10 to May 25, 1990.

The questionnaire consisted of fifty-five items, which dealt with the following categories: socio-economic status; personal and social influences on decision-making; parental aspirations, attitudes, and involvement; ethnicity and language; socio-political issues; myths versus realities of immersion and core French; and attitudes toward second language acquisition. In preparation for designing the questionnaire, an extensive literature search, which included a computor ERIC search was completed. Besides reading literature on the pertinent topics in French immersion, the investigator made an attempt to coordinate some questions with existing studies. These included a French immersion study

conducted by Rita M. Bienvenue (1983), Gallup British Columbia Omnibus, (1982), and The Environics Survey (1990). The aim of designing questions compatible with questions in other surveys was to provide an easy baseline for comparison between the findings of this study and others on certain topics. Parents and an expert in the field critiqued the preliminary questionnaire and changes were made as a result of the critique.

**Research questions**

1. Do parents consider the decision regarding the choice between the regular English program and the French immersion program for their children a difficult one?

2. Is the French immersion program serving children from upper socio-economic backgrounds as indicated by the educational level and the type of occupation of their parents?

3. Do parents of students in the English program differ from parents of students in the French immersion program with respect to:
   - 3.0 the belief that parents have the right to choose a French immersion program?
   - 3.1 the perception of pressure from the community to select either the English or the French immersion program?
   - 3.2 outside influences on program selection?

3.3 satisfaction with their placement decision and with the quality of instruction their children are receiving?

3.4 educational aspirations for their children?

3.5 confidence in their children's ability to cope with the immersion experience?

3.6 involvement in school-like learning activities?

4. Is there a relationship between ethnic background and selection of program?

5. Is there a relationship between the number of languages spoken by parents and selection of program?

6. Is there a difference between the views of parents with students in the English program and parents with students in the French immersion program regarding:

6.0 the official language policy of Canada?

6.1 the necessity for children in Alberta to learn French?

6.2 the separation of Quebec from the rest of Canada?

6.3 the stability of their opinion toward French in school?

7. Is there a difference between parents of children in the English program and parents of children in the French immersion program with respect to their perception of and attitude toward core French and French immersion programs - specifically:

7.0 the fluency of children who study core French?

7.1 the fluency of children in French immersion?

7.2 the best way for English-speaking students to become bilingual?

7.3 the French immersion program as too much of an experiment?

7.4 the English skills of children in French immersion?

7.5 the appropriateness of the program for children who are gifted/talented and children who are speech impaired/ delayed or who have learning/personality problems?

7.6 the cost and benefit of the French immersion program in a school?

7.7 the immersion program as an enrichment program?

7.8 the continuation of the French immersion program through Grade 12?

8. Is there a difference between parents of children in the English program and parents of children in the French immersion program with respect to their attitudes toward second-language acquisition as indicated by their:

8.0 desire to learn a second language?

8.1 perception that immersion creates an elite group?

8.2 motivation to learn French?

9. Is there a difference between parents of students in the English program and parents of students in the French

immersion program with respect to their beliefs regarding:

9.0 the amount of emphasis on French immersion at Ecole Mountain View School?

9.1 dual-track and neighbornood schools?

**Data analysis**

The results of the study were presented in terms of similarities and differences between the two sets of parents on the questions as stated above. The statistical analysis included percentages and chi squares. The significance level was the .05 level of confidence. One hundred and sixty-seven parents returned a completed questionnaire. This was a 68.2% response. Of parents with children in the regular English program, 48% responded; of parents with children in the French immersion program, 79% responded; of parents with children in both programs, 100% responded. While there was a large difference with respect to the response rate between the two parent groups, this return was high with respect to volunteer research and adequate for all statistical tests.

## Assumptions

The following basic assumptions underlie this study:

- The questionnaire was sufficiently valid to produce the necessary data for this research study.
- The response rate provided confidence in the reliability of the results.
- Since the responses were anonymous, it was likely that respondents would provide information accurately and frankly.

## Delimitations

- The study involved parents of students from kindergarten to grade 7 attending Mountain View School in Hinton.

## Limitations

- Many students from outside the Mountain View School attendance area are enrolled in the French immersion program; thus, their parents received a questionnaire. Those parents of English students outside the attendance area did not.
- Investigator bias stemming from past, personal, and professional experiences may have slanted the questions and the responses. This limitation is difficult to control.
- It is possible that some parents did not receive the questionnaires because the investigator relied on young students to give them to their parents.
- Respondents may give socially acceptable criticism or recommendation instead of a more frank opinion on an issue.
- Parents might be naturally inclined to defend their decisions rather than admit bad judgement.
- Since the questionnaire came from the school and was signed by the assistant principal of the school (the investigator), the return rate may have been higher than expected.

## Definitions

core French - usually 30 minutes instruction per day beginning in grade four; available as a complementary course (optional) at the grade seven level for a total of 46 hours

dual-track school - a school offering the regular English program and an immersion program in a language other than English

early immersion - a program beginning in kindergarten or grade one where 80 - 100% of instruction is in French and English Language Arts starts in grade three

French immersion program - a language program designed primarily for students whose first language is not French; French is the language of instruction for at least fifty percent of each school day

immersion center - a school where French is the language of administration and instruction, except for the time spent learning English as a subject. Students learn a second language in a French environment where all staff, from administration to support staff, are bilingual.

language disabled - a child, who in spite of physical well being, normal intelligence, and a healthy personality acquires language extemely slowly. Usually this child is late to use words, to combine them, and to develop clear articulation and appropriate syntax. Both comprehension and production are difficult.

lead class - the first French immersion class to advance one grade level yearly

mother tongue - first language spoken and still understood

socio-economic status - rank or position in society based on occupation and level of education

total immersion program - a program in which 80 - 100% of instruction is in French

yuppie - a young urban professional who is upwardly mobile

# CHAPTER 4

## ANALYSIS OF QUESTIONNAIRE RESULTS

The following results are based on the return of 167 questionnaires by 48% of parents with children in the English program and 79% of parents with children in the French immersion program from kindergarten to grade 7.

### Difficulty of Choice

1.0 Do parents consider the decision regarding the choice between the regular English program and the French immersion program for their child a difficult one?

While no statistically significant difference exists between parents of students in the English program and parents of students in the French immersion program, the data indicate that approximately one-third (32.5%) of parents found the decision regarding placement a difficult one (see Table 3).

### Socio-economic factors

2.0 Is the French immersion program serving children from upper socio-economic backgrounds as indicated by the educational level and the type of occupation of their parents?

As indicated in Tables 4 and 5, a statistically

Table 3

Perception of Decision-making as Difficult by Program

| Program | Yes | No | [i]Row Total |
|---|---|---|---|
| [a]English | | | |
| [b]Count | 13 | 30 | 43 |
| [c]Exp Val | 14.0 | 29.0 | 26.4% |
| [d]Row % | 30.2% | 69.8% | |
| [e]Col % | 24.5% | 27.3% | |
| [f]Tot % | 8.0% | 18.4% | |
| [g]French Imm | | | |
| Count | 40 | 80 | 120 |
| Exp Val | 39.0 | 81.0 | 73.6% |
| Row % | 33.3% | 66.7% | |
| Col % | 75.5% | 72.7% | |
| Tot % | 24.5% | 49.1% | |
| [h]Column Total | 53 | 110 | 163 |
| | 32.5% | 67.5% | 100.0% |

Note. $X^2$ (1, N = 163) = 0.1387, p>.05. [a] English refers to parents of students in the English program. [b] Count refers to the actual number of responses. [c] Exp Val refers to the expected number of responses. [d] Row % indicates the percentage of English parents who responded 'yes' (i.e. 13/43=30.2%) or 'no' (i.e. 30/43=69.8%). [e] Col % indicates the percentage of parents with children in a specific program who selected a particular response [i.e. English parents comprise 24.5% (13/53) of all parents who selected a 'yes' response.] [f] Tot % indicates the percentage of parents with children in each program who selected a particular response out of the total parent responses [i.e. 8% (13/163) of parents selected 'yes' and had children in the English program]. [g] Column Total indicates the actual number and percentage of the total number of respondents who answered 'yes' [53/163=32.5%). [h] French imm refers to the French immersion program. [i] Row Total indicates the actual number and percentage of parents who responded by program.

Table 4

Education of Parents by Program

| Program | Completed High School | Community College/ Vocational/ Trade School/ Commercial | Some University/ Completed University/ Professional School/Post Graduate | Row Total |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| English | | | | |
| Count | 44 | 30 | 9 | 83 |
| Exp Val | 36.3 | 24.4 | 22.3 | |
| Row % | 53.0 | 36.1 | 10.8 | 26.9% |
| Col % | 33.6 | 33.0 | 10.8 | |
| Tot % | 14.2 | 9.7 | 2.9 | |
| French Imm | | | | |
| Count | 91 | 61 | 74 | 226 |
| Exp Val | 98.7 | 66.5 | 60.7 | |
| Row % | 40.3 | 27.0 | 32.7 | 73.1% |
| Col % | 67.4 | 67.0 | 89.2 | |
| Tot % | 29.4 | 19.7 | 23.9 | |
| Column Total | 135 43.7 | 91 29.4 | 83 26.9 | 309 100.0% |

Note. $X^2 = (2, N = 309) = 14.818$, $p<.01$

significant difference exists between parents of students in the English program and parents of students in the French immersion program with respect to occupational status and educational background. In the case of parents with students in the English program, where one would expect eighteen persons to be engaged in a class 1 occupation, only five persons (6.8%) appeared in this class. For the same class, with respect to parents of children in French immersion, the expected number of persons is forty-nine and the actual count was sixty-two - 30% of the total immersion parent population. Similar results were obtained with respect to education. Where one would expect twenty-two parents of students in the English program to have some university training, the actual number reported is nine. In contrast, where one would expect sixty-one parents of French immersion students to have some university training, the actual number reported is seventy-four (see Table 5).

## Personal and Social/Community Factors Affecting Parental Choice

3.0 <u>Do parents of students in the English program differ from parents of students in the French immersion program with respect to the belief that parents have the right to choose a French immersion program?</u>

A tabulation of responses showed that 95.6% of parents agreed that they should have the right to choose a French immersion program for their child(ren) (English 90.2%; French

Table 5

Occupation of Parents by Program

| Program | Class 1[a] | Class 2[b] | Class 3[c] | Class 4[d] | Class 5[e] | Class 6[f] | Class 7[g] | Other | Row Total |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| English | | | | | | | | | |
| Count | 5 | 3 | 5 | 12 | 14 | 28 | 4 | 3 | 74 |
| Exp Val | 17.6 | 1.1 | 4.0 | 11.1 | 12.9 | 20.0 | 3.7 | 3.7 | |
| Row % | 6.8 | 4.1 | 6.8 | 16.2 | 18.9 | 37.8 | 5.4 | 4.1 | 26.3% |
| Col % | 7.5 | 75.0 | 33.3 | 28.6 | 28.6 | 36.8 | 28.6 | 21.4 | |
| Tot % | 1.8 | 1.1 | 1.8 | 4.3 | 5.0 | 10.0 | 1.4 | 1.1 | |
| French Im | | | | | | | | | |
| Count | 62 | 1 | 10 | 30 | 35 | 48 | 10 | 11 | 207 |
| Exp Val | 49.4 | 2.9 | 11.1 | 30.9 | 36.1 | 56.0 | 10.0 | 10.2 | |
| Row % | 30.0 | 0.5 | 4.8 | 14.5 | 16.9 | 23.2 | 4.8 | 5.3 | 73.7% |
| Col % | 92.5 | 25.0 | 66.7 | 71.4 | 71.4 | 63.2 | 71.4 | 78.6 | |
| Tot % | 22.1 | 0.4 | 3.6 | 10.7 | 12.5 | 17.1 | 3.6 | 3.9 | |
| Column Total | 67 23.8 | 4 1.4 | 15 5.3 | 42 14.9 | 49 17.4 | 76 27.0 | 14 5.0 | 14 5.0 | 281 100.0% |

Note. Blishen (1964) Occupational Class Scale. $\chi^2$ (7, N = 281) = 22.37, p<.01

[a] Professional. [b] Administrator or Owner of Big Business. [c] Technician Semi-Professional. [d] Administrator or Owner of Small Business. [e] Office Worker (White Collar), Service, Sales. [f] Tradesman, Semi-Skilled or Skilled Worker (Blue Collar). [g] Unskilled Worker.

immersion 97.5%). A statistically significant difference between the parents of students in the English program and parents of students in the French immersion program was evident in the data. [$\chi^2$ (1, $N$ = 160) = 3.8154, $p$<.05].

3.1 Do parents of students in the English program differ from parents of students in the French immersion program with respect to the perception of pressure from the community to select either the English or the French immersion program?

As indicated by the data presented in Table 6, the majority (91.4%) of parents did not feel pressure from members of the community with respect to the placement of their child in a particular program. No statistically significant difference between parents was suggested with respect to this question.

3.2 Do parents of students in the English program differ from parents of students in the French immersion program with respect to outside influences on program selection?

T-test results as shown in Table 7, indicated that there was a significant difference between parents with children in French immersion and parents with children in the regular English program with respect to outside influences on program selection. These results suggested that the presence of friends in a particular program and the rating of programs by

Table 6

Pressure From Community by Program

| Program | Pressure | No Pressure | Row Total |
|---|---|---|---|
| English | | | |
| Count | 4 | 39 | 43 |
| Exp Val | 3.7 | 39.3 | 26.4% |
| Row % | 9.3% | 90.7% | |
| Col % | 28.6% | 26.2% | |
| Tot % | 2.5% | 23.9% | |
| French Imm | | | |
| Count | 10 | 110 | 120 |
| Exp Val | 10.3 | 109.7 | 73.6% |
| Row % | 8.3% | 91.7% | |
| Col % | 71.4% | 73.8% | |
| Tot % | 6.1% | 67.5% | |
| Column Total | 14 8.6% | 149 91.4% | 163 100.0% |

Note. $X^2$ (1, N = 163) = 0.0378, p>.05

Table 7

Mean Scores on Factors Affecting Parents' Decision-Making by Program

| Program | Mean | Standard Deviation | Standard Error |
|---|---|---|---|
| English | 7.83 | 1.57 | .24 |
| French Imm | 7.28 | 1.42 | .13 |

Note. a) T value 2.13 df 161 2 t Tail probability .035 (pooled variance estimate)

b) T value 2.03 df 63.38 2 t Tail probability .046 (separate variance estimate)

other parents and school personnel were more important considerations for parents of English students than for parents of French immersion students.

3.3 Do parents of students in the English program differ from parents of students in the French immersion program with respect to satisfaction with their placement decision and with the quality of instruction their children are receiving?

Data as provided on Table 8 indicated that nearly all parents (97%) were either somewhat or very satisfied with their choice of program. About two-thirds of both groups were very satisfied (English 69.8%; French 65.5%). No significant difference was found between the groups. Similarly, 95% of parents were either satisfied or very satisfied with the quality of instruction their child(ren) was (were) receiving. Again, no significant difference appeared between parent groups. However, compared to satisfaction with choice of program, a somewhat lower level of satisfaction was recorded with respect to instruction.

Interestingly, there was a significant difference between the two groups of parents concerning their choice of program for a child entering kindergarten in the fall. The data, as presented in Table 9, showed that 69.8% of parents with students in the English program would place a child in an English kindergarten program in September 1990, and 18.6%

Table 8

Satisfaction with Placement Decision and Quality of Instruction

| Program | [a]Placement Decision | [b]Quality of Instruction |
|---|---|---|
| English | | |
| very satisfied | 69.8% | 46.5% |
| somewhat satisfied | 27.9% | 48.8% |
| not at all | 2.3% | 4.7% |
| French Imm | | |
| very satisfied | 65.5% | 55.8% |
| somewhat satisfied | 31.9% | 39.2% |
| not at all | 2.5% | 5.0% |

Note. [a]$X^2$ = (2, N = 162) = 0.2551, p>.05. [b]$X^2$ (2, N = 163) = 1.2328, p>.05.

Table 9

Preferred Program for Child Entering Kindergarten in the Fall

| Program | English K | French K | Undecided | Row Total |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| English | | | | |
| Count | 30 | 5 | 8 | 43 |
| Exp Val | 9.1 | 27.9 | 5.9 | 26.9% |
| Row % | 69.8% | 11.6% | 18.6% | |
| Col % | 88.2% | 4.8% | 36.4% | |
| Tot % | 18.8% | 3.1% | 5.0% | |
| French Imm | | | | |
| Count | 4 | 99 | 14 | 117 |
| Exp Val | 24.9 | 76.0 | 16.1 | 73.1% |
| Row % | 3.4% | 84.6% | 12.0% | |
| Col % | 11.8% | 95.2% | 63.6% | |
| Tot % | 2.5% | 61.9% | 8.8% | |
| Column Total | 34 21.3% | 104 65.0% | 22 13.8% | 160 100.0% |

Note. $X^2$ (2, N = 160) = 91.9167, p<.001

indicated that they were undecided with respect to a kindergarten placement in the fall. On the other hand, 84.6% of parents with children in French immersion would select French immersion if they had a child entering kindergarten in the fall and 12% were undecided.

3.4 Do parents of students in the English program differ from parents of students in the French immersion program with respect to educational aspirations for their children?

The data did not show a statistically significant difference between parents of students in the regular English program and parents of students in the French immersion program concerning educational aspirations for their children [$\chi^2$ (1, N = 161) = 1.8949, p>.05]. Most parents (79%) hoped their child would attend university (English 71.4%; French 81.5%). While almost the same percentage hoped their child would complete university (English 57.1%; French 54.6%), 20.2% of parents with children in immersion hoped their children would reach the post-graduate level compared to 11.9% of parents with students in the English program.

3.5 Do parents of students in the English program differ from parents of students in the French immersion program with respect to confidence in their children's ability to cope with the immersion experience?

Data indicated that a statistically significant

difference exists between parents with respect to confidence in their children's ability to cope with the immersion experience [$\chi^2$ (1, $N$ = 158) = 23.2250, $p<.05$]. Of the 158 parents who responded to this item, over one half (58.5%) of the parents with children in the regular English program agreed that the French immersion program might be an upsetting or confusing experience for their child(ren). Fewer than one fifth (18.8%) of French immersion parents considered this to be the case. Also, a significant difference between parents was indicated by their responses to an item asking if they would find it embarrassing not to be able to understand a conversation between their child and a teacher. A majority (62.5%) of parents with children in the English program agreed, while only 8.5% of parents with children in the immersion program shared the same feeling. [$\chi^2$ (1, $N$ = 157) = 50.0896, $p<.05$].

3.6 <u>Do parents of students in the English program differ from parents of students in the French immersion program with respect to involvement in school-like learning activities?</u>

As evident from Table 10, a statistically significant difference between parents with respect to volunteering at school was indicated by the data. Compared to their counterparts, there was a much higher percentage of parents with children in immersion who volunteered regularly (French immersion 23.3%; English 4.7%). Approximately one quarter of

each group does not volunteer at all (English 25.6%; French 22.5%).

Data showed no difference between parent groups with respect to the number of books available at home. Almost all parents (92%) have 50 or more books at home [$\chi^2$ (2, $N$ = 163) = 2.7858, $p$>.05]. While no difference existed with respect to the availability of books, a statistically significant difference was found between parents concerning the frequency with which their children are read to at home. An interesting pattern was evident from the data shown on Table 11. As the frequency of reading increased, the percentage of parents with children in immersion who read to their children increased; conversely, as the frequency of reading increased for parents with children in the English program, the percentage who read to their children decreased. According to the data, 42.9% of parents with children in immersion read to their children almost every night compared to 19% of their counterparts.

The percentage of questionnaires returned could also be viewed as an indicator of parental involvement in the education of their children. Again, parents with children in French immersion appeared to be more involved than parents with children in the English program (French immersion 79%; English 48%).

Table 10

Volunteer Frequency by Program

| Program | Not at all | Occasionally | Regularly | Row Total |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| English | | | | |
| Count | 11 | 30 | 2 | 43 |
| Exp Val | 10.0 | 25.1 | 7.9 | 26.4% |
| Row % | 25.6% | 69.8% | 4.7% | |
| Col % | 28.9% | 31.6% | 6.7% | |
| Tot % | 6.7% | 18.4% | 1.2% | |
| French Imm | | | | |
| Count | 27 | 65 | 28 | 120 |
| Exp Val | 28.0 | 69.9 | 22.1 | 73.6% |
| Row % | 22.5% | 54.2% | 23.3% | |
| Col % | 71.1% | 68.4% | 93.3% | |
| Tot % | 16.6% | 39.9% | 17.2% | |
| Column | 38 | 95 | 30 | 163 |
| Total | 23.3% | 58.3% | 18.4% | 100.0% |

Note. $X^2$ (2, N = 163) = 7.4541, $p<.05$

Table 11

Frequency of Reading by Program

| Program | Occasionally | Several Times/Week | Almost Every Night | Row Total |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| English | | | | |
| Count | 19 | 15 | 8 | 42 |
| Exp Val | 10.7 | 15.9 | 15.4 | 26.1% |
| Row % | 45.2% | 35.7% | 19.0% | |
| Col % | 46.3% | 24.6% | 13.6% | |
| Tot % | 11.8% | 9.3% | 5.0% | |
| French Imm | | | | |
| Count | 22 | 46 | 51 | 119 |
| Exp Val | 30.3 | 45.1 | 43.6 | 73.9% |
| Row % | 18.5% | 38.7% | 42.9% | |
| Col % | 53.7% | 75.4% | 86.4% | |
| Tot % | 13.7% | 28.6% | 31.7% | |
| Column | 41 | 61 | 59 | 161 |
| Total | 25.5% | 37.9% | 36.6% | 100.0% |

Note. $X^2$ (2, N = 161) = 13.5964, $p<.001$

## Influence of Ethnic Background

4.0 Is there a relationship between ethnic background and selection of program?

As shown in Table 12, there were no significant statistical differences among the French, the English and the minority groups with regard to placement. It is noteworthy that 86% of French Canadians have enrolled their children in the French immersion program. These quantitative results were also supported by eight parents who cited ethnic background as their reason for selecting the French immersion program. It is also interesting that most parents from both groups identify their ethnic origin as neither British nor French but as 'other' (French immersion 59.6%; English 69.8%).

## Influence of Linguistic Background

5.0 Is there a relationship between the number of languages spoken by parents and selection of program?

According to the data, there is no statistically significant relationship between the number of languages spoken by a parent and their children's placement [$X^2$ (2, $N$ = 159) = 1.8462, $p$>.05].

Table 12

Ethnic Background by Program

| Program | British | French | Other | Row Total |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| English | | | | |
| Count | 18 | 8 | 60 | 86 |
| Exp Val | 17.41 | 15.03 | 53.55 | 26.4% |
| Row % | 20.9% | 9.3% | 69.8% | |
| Col % | 27.3% | 14.0% | 29.6% | |
| Tot % | 5.5% | 2.5% | 18.4% | |
| French Imm | | | | |
| Count | 48 | 49 | 143 | 240 |
| Exp Val | 48.58 | 41.96 | 149.44 | 73.6% |
| Row % | 20.0% | 20.4% | 59.6% | |
| Col % | 72.7% | 86.0% | 70.4% | |
| Tot % | 14.7% | 15.0% | 43.9% | |
| Column Total | 66 20.2% | 57 17.5% | 203 62.3% | 326 100.0% |

Note. $X^2$ (2, N = 326) = 5.54, $p > .05$

Views on Socio-Political Issues

6.0 Is there a difference between the views of parents with students in the English program and parents with students in the French immersion program regarding the official languages policy of Canada?

Views as indicated by the data on the official languages policy were statistically significantly different between the two groups of parents. While 73.9% of parents with students in French immersion agreed that the policy of bilingualism is a good idea, this is the case for only 32.5% of their counterparts. [$\chi^2$ (1, $N$ = 155) = 21.8908. $p<.05$]. The data also indicate that there was a statistically significant difference in parents' views regarding the amount of effort Canadians should be making to learn both French and English. While 85.0% of parents of children in immersion agreed that more of an effort should be made to learn both languages, 37.5% of parents with students in the regular English program shared the same view [$\chi^2$ (1, $N$ = 153) = 33.4068, $p<.05$].

6.1 Is there a difference between the views of parents with students in the English program and parents with students in the French immersion program regarding the necessity for children in Alberta to learn French?

Approximately two-thirds (68.6%) of parents with children in the English program believed that children in Alberta should learn French. This view was shared by 92.5% of their counterparts. These data suggested that a statistically significant difference between parents exists regarding the necessity for children in Alberta to learn French. Most (86.6%) parents deemed it necessary for children in Alberta to learn French [$\chi^2$ (1, $N$ = 142) = 13.0545, $p<.05$].

6.2 Is there a difference between the views of parents with students in the English program and parents with students in the French immersion program regarding the separation of Quebec from the rest of Canada?

As evident from the results in Table 13, a statistically significant difference was indicated by the data with respect to views on this issue. While 70.7% of parents did not agree with Quebec separation, 81.0% of parents with children in French immersion shared this view compared to only 41.5% of their counterparts. In addition, 12.2% of parents with children in the English program agree with the separation of Quebec compared with 4.3% of their counterparts.

6.3 Is there a difference between the views of parents with students in the English program and parents with students in the French immersion program regarding the stability of their opinion with respect to French in school?

Table 13

Views of Parents on Quebec Separation by Program

| Program | Yes | No | Undecided | Row Total |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| English | | | | |
| Count | 5 | 17 | 19 | 41 |
| Exp Val | 2.6 | 29.0 | 9.4 | 26.1% |
| Row % | 12.2% | 41.5% | 46.3% | |
| Col % | 50.0% | 15.3% | 52.8% | |
| Tot % | 3.2% | 10.8% | 12.1% | |
| French Imm. | | | | |
| Count | 5 | 94 | 17 | 116 |
| Exp Val | 7.4 | 82.0 | 26.6 | 73.9% |
| Row % | 4.3% | 81.0% | 14.7% | |
| Col % | 50.0% | 84.7% | 47.2% | |
| Tot % | 3.2% | 59.9% | 10.8% | |
| Column Total | 10 6.4% | 111 70.7% | 36 22.9% | 157 100.0% |

Note. $X^2$ (2, N = 157) = 22.9302, p<.001

The data suggested that there was a significant difference in the responses of the two groups of parents to this question [$\chi^2$ (1, N = 162) = 3.7028, $p<.05$.]. Although 90.7% of parents reported that their opinion concerning children learning French in school in order to become bilingual has not changed over the past year, 16.7% of parents with children in the English program reported a change in opinion compared to only 6.7% of parents with children in the French immersion program.

## Views on the French Immersion Program

7.0 Is there a difference between parents of children in the English program and parents of children in the French immersion program with respect to their perception of the fluency of children who study core French?

Results as shown in Table 14, indicated that there was a statistically significant difference between parents' groups with respect to their perceptions of the results of the core French program. Fifty percent of parents with students who are taking core French or will be taking it, didn't know whether children would be functionally bilingual after grade 12. Interestingly, while 35.7% of these parents believed their children would be functionally bilingual after grade 12, a similar percentage (37.3%) of parents with children in French immersion disagreed.

Table 14

Parental Perception Regarding Functional Bilingualism of Core French Graduates by Program

| Program | Yes | No | Don't Know | Row Total |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| English | | | | |
| Count | 15 | 6 | 21 | 42 |
| Exp Val | 10.8 | 13.1 | 18.1 | 26.3% |
| Row % | 35.7% | 14.3% | 50.0% | |
| Col % | 36.6% | 12.0% | 30.4% | |
| Tot % | 9.4% | 3.8% | 13.1% | |
| French Imm | | | | |
| Count | 26 | 44 | 48 | 118 |
| Exp Val | 30.2 | 36.9 | 50.9 | 73.8% |
| Row % | 22.0% | 37.3% | 40.7% | |
| Col % | 63.4% | 88.0% | 69.6% | |
| Tot % | 16.3% | 27.5% | 30.0% | |
| Column Total | 41 25.6% | 50 31.3% | 69 43.1% | 160 100.0% |

Note. $X^2$ (2, N = 160) = 8.1309, p=.01